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SUBJECT: CODEL MCCONNELL AND MOI ATMAR - ELECTION SECURITY
AND A SLAP AT PAKISTAN

REF: KABUL 987

Classified By: Charge Francis J. Ricciardone, Jr. for reasons 1.4 (b) a
nd (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. After expressing his gratitude to CODEL McConnell for U.S. support for Afghanistan, Minister of Interior Hanif Atmar described security preparations for the August elections, noting the immense task of safeguarding voting sites, political candidates, election workers, international observers and journalists. Other discussion topics included counternarcotics, corruption and terrorism. Minister Atmar saved his most serious and sober comments for Pakistan, criticizing the ISI directly for support of insurgents and urging coordinated International Community (IC) pressure on Pakistan to rein in terrorists during the lead up to elections. End summary.

¶2. (U) Senators McConnell, Chambliss, Barrasso and Risch met with Minister of Interior Atmar on April 12. Minister Atmar began by saying that he was "enormously gratified" by the generous financial support of the U.S. for his country and for the many brave soldiers who have fought on its behalf. He also said he loved the new Obama Administration strategy, but would have liked to have seen specific numbers recommended for the various components of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

¶3. (U) The primary topic of discussion was election security in preparation for Presidential and provincial elections scheduled for August 20. In response to Sen. McConnell's request for a status report, Atmar described the challenge of securing 7,000 voting sites, and increasing number of political candidates, members of the Independent Election Commission (IEC), international observers and journalists covering the event. He estimated there could be 2,000 observers and 500-700 journalists (numbers that others find high). He noted he would ask the international observers to also keep an eye on his own police officers, a reference to potential corruption.

¶4. (U) While expressing his pleasure with U.S. plans to send 17,000 more troops and an additional 4,000 trainers to Afghanistan, Atmar made the pitch for expansion of the Afghan National Police (ANP). With sustainment costs per police officer of \$4,000 per year, Atmar thought such minimal costs should not be a hindrance to the U.S.

¶5. (SBU) Sen. Chambliss offered that COMISAF told them there can,t be a solely military solution to the insurgency, and that the Taliban don,t have enough fighters to attack 7,000 voting sites. Atmar said that for those who favor political

reconciliation, the only way that will happen is if each insurgent knows that he can't win and that he will get no support from Pakistan. Suicide bombers are trained by an "industry" outside of the country, and not by the Taliban. A non-military solution must also stop funding for the Quetta shura. Atmar went on to describe the importance of intelligence-led policing. While he is building up such capabilities in the MOI, he has no intelligence officers in the field, and has asked the International Community (IC) to provide funding and training ("\$15-17 million to do it right"). Intelligence had led to the recent discovery of 200 kilograms of explosive that were destined for an attack on Parliament.

¶6. (U) In response to a question from Sen. Barrasso on drug trafficking, Atmar said there had been no "quantum leap" as of yet. He touted the 5,000 hectares that had been eradicated this year vs. 3,000 last year, with a target of 14,000 hectares. There had been 660 drug arrests, with a 35 percent conviction rate. Although eradication is important, preventing poppy cultivation should be a top priority. Nangahar is almost poppy free because of compacts drawn up between the GIROA and local communities there, a model that should be expanded to other parts of the country.

¶7. (SBU) Sen. Risch asked the Minister how he planned to tackle police corruption. Atmar said that his Office of the Inspector General will be the permanent body that investigates allegations of corruption, but that 10 general officers had already been relieved of command on corruption charges, along with over 400 police officers. Atmar said he had released his own personal asset inventory the week

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before, and would expect his subordinates to provide the same information to internal auditors. Merit-based appointments would move MOI away from the cronyism that was common in the past. He wants 300 ANP to be trained as inspectors, and has asked many different elements of the USG for assistance in identifying the resources to do so. His "119" hotline to report security tips or complain about the police was receiving 40 calls each day. Referencing a recent New York Times article on corruption within the police, Atmar said it was accurate but that it is a more complex challenge than reported there, and that there was no recognition of the sacrifices and casualties suffered by the ANP in defending the country. Finally, Atmar said, "it is not the Taliban but corruption that will destroy us."

¶8. (C) The Minister's most serious and sober comments came early on during the discussion on election security. Atmar asserted a direct role by Pakistan's ISI in supporting insurgent groups, listing ISI in the same breath as the Taliban, Haqqani network and Al-Qaeda. We need coordinated IC pressure on Pakistan, which worked in the lead up to the 2004 elections. He noted he had just returned from Tripartite talks in Turkey a few days earlier, and was reminded of the "pigheadedness" of Pakistan in such policy discussions.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) Minister Atmar is extremely strategic and thoughtful in communicating with the IC, always knowing exactly what he wants to accomplish in advance of such meetings. But in this particular case, his comments on Pakistan came across as unscripted and heartfelt, his anger barely hidden beneath the surface.

¶10. (U) CODEL McConnell did not have an opportunity to clear this report.
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